

Dr. Lara Adesso

**Testimony on SB 284 An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen
years for an Income-eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance
Regardless of Immigration Status
Thursday, March 10, 2022**

I stand in support of S.B. 284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults. Investment in expanding healthcare coverage for all residents of the State is extremely important, and I appreciate your willingness to invest in our children and State systems as a whole.

I am a Child and Adolescent psychiatry fellow at the Institute of Living and I care about this because I have seen first-hand how undocumented children struggle to receive appropriate medical and mental health care in Connecticut.

I have seen unauthorized children in the psychiatric emergency room, sit and wait for days to weeks for an inpatient bed, without being sent to a facility due to lack of health coverage.

Currently, it is estimated that Connecticut has a population of over 100,000 unauthorized individuals. The state of Connecticut provides healthcare coverage to the state's most vulnerable, low-income children, but leaves out undocumented children over the age of eight. They are permitted the right to education, but not the right to medical coverage and a healthy life. Uninsured children are significantly less likely to obtain necessary medical care, preventative care, timely treatment or mental health care. By expanding Medicaid coverage to unauthorized children up to 18 years old, the number of uninsured children reduces emergency room usage, improves educational and health outcomes as well as lower uncompensated care for hospitals. Expanding Medicaid coverage could assure medical access to all children, improve access to primary care, lead to early detection of chronic illness and potentially have an enormous long-term impact on the youth of Connecticut.

At this time, there are six other states that have expanded their programs to cover all income-eligible children regardless of immigration status; California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Washington, Oregon and Washington D.C. Our country, which is a melting pot of all different ethnicities, races and religions, is known for its potential for a better life and future. The children of unauthorized individuals are being brought to America for a chance of greater opportunity. As a child psychiatrist whose life's work is dedicated to improving the lives of children and as a child of an immigrant; I urge you to consider expanding the coverage to all unauthorized children.

I applaud the committee for recognizing the need for healthcare coverage for unauthorized children up to age eight. Clearly, we have seen growth and expansion in paving a way for these at risk children. They already face challenges in language barriers, traumatic journeys into the country and fears of deportation

and/or being separated from loved ones. By expanding healthcare coverage, we abolish an additional barrier to healthcare access. It ensures parity amongst all children in obtaining necessary, timely and appropriate medical and mental health care.

I support S.B. 284 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

I thank you for allowing me to engage in this debate, and hope you consider my comments. I am happy to serve as a further resource to the committee if you so desire. I can be contacted at laraaddresso.hhchealth.org.

Thank you for your time,

Lara Addesso, MD